

Dec. 7, 1941, A Day of Infamy

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It was a day never to be forgotten — in President Franklin D. Roosevelt's somber words, "a date which will live in infamy."

Japan had taken the United States by surprise, tragically bombing Pearl Harbor Dec. 7, 1941, while negotiations were going on in Washington.

More than 350 planes had zeroed in on the harbor and other military targets from six carriers — part of a 33-vessel task force which had crept without detection to within 200 miles of Oahu.

Stunned Americans generally learned of the disaster from bulletins broadcast or published in newspaper "extras." Shock, followed by a sense of anger, swept the nation.

On Dec. 8, the U.S. declared war on Japan. Roosevelt seemed to weld the national mood in the opening words of his speech to Congress before the vote on the war resolutions.



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His "day of infamy" line has been oft-quoted ever since.

Today as you visit the peaceful Pearl Harbor scene and glide by motor launch through its tranquil waters, it is hard to realize this was the scene of

such fiery carnage 43 years ago.

But reflections turn to the stark realities when you:

— Visit the memorial shrine over the sunken 608-foot battleship USS Arizona and scan names of 1,100 men entombed within the rusting hulk.

— View the partially-sunken remains of the USS Utah, one-time battleship later converted to an anti-aircraft training vessel.

— Or watch films at the Harbor Visitors Center of the actual 1941 attack.

My wife and I had these experiences a few years ago, as many of you readers have had through the years. Memories linger ...

Losses during the two-hour Japanese attack tell the sad story in part:

Ninety-four naval vessels were in the harbor at the time — eight battleships, nine cruisers, 31 destroyers, five submarines and other auxiliaries.

Nineteen of the ships were sunk or severely damaged. Destroyed U.S. aircraft totaled 188.

Military casualties were 2,280 killed and 1,109 wounded. Sixty-eight civilians also were killed.

The Japanese lost 29 planes, hit by anti-aircraft fire or shot down in "Dogfights" with Army planes.

After the Pearl Harbor disaster, it was a long haul building up America's military might and weaponry while fighting the Japanese and moving into the European phase of World War II also. The U.S. march back across the Pacific finally ended when Japan announced its surrender Aug. 14, 1945.

The 43rd anniversary of the "day of infamy" is a good time to reflect on the lessons of Pearl Harbor, especially the need to be diplomatically and militarily strong as well as constantly prepared and alert.